

# National Public Safety Telecommunications Week Planning Guide April 8-14, 2007



Volume 1, Issue 1

## Honor Calltakers and Dispatchers



**Set aside the second week of April as a time to honor public safety telecommunications.**

The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International thanks all telecommunications personnel in the public safety community for your continued efforts to preserve the public's safety. Although APCO International does all it can to honor our calltakers and dispatchers throughout the year, National Public Safety Telecommunications Week (April 8-14, 2007) has been set aside so everyone can be made more aware of your hard work and dedi-

cation, which provide a vital link to the public safety services on which we have come to rely every day.

We encourage all of you to celebrate and honor yourselves, your co-workers, your bosses and your employees. Take the time this week to host a party, reach out to your local media and public officials, or launch an awards program. This newsletter will provide helpful tools and suggestions aimed at making National Public Safety Telecommunications Week 2007 a memo-

orable one for you and your colleagues.

We would also like your input in the form of shared ideas and photos of your agency celebrations during this year's festivities.

Thank you, again, for all the sacrifices you make to create a better and safer world for the public. Your commitment to your profession is appreciated by all of APCO International, the public safety communications community, and the citizens you serve.

### Special points of interest:

- **Out of the box thinking**
- **Open house ideas**
- **Download templates to promote your comm center**

## Ideas on How to Celebrate

**It doesn't matter how you celebrate, just so long as you celebrate.**



Tight budgets don't have to keep you from celebrating. Be creative! Ask your local restaurants if they would be willing to make food donations to your celebration. Ask a local grocery store chain to donate a cake or deli platter. Local vendors, such as salons and businesses, may donate items or services that you can raffle off or award to your telecommunications. Make "door

prizes" for your telecommunications, such as "Primo Parking Spot for One Week" or "Ask for a Day off and Get it" or "Get out of Overtime Once" coupons. It doesn't matter how you celebrate, just so long as you celebrate.

Your celebration is contingent upon your resources and your creativity. Have a cake or host an elaborate

banquet. Many agencies have a "theme day" for the week, with casual dress and food based around that day's theme, such as Sports Day, I love the 80s Day, Crazy Hat Day, Dress-Down day and Dress-up Day.

Need a few more ideas? See page 3.

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## Steps to Promoting Your Communications Center

### Obtain a Proclamation.

To obtain a Proclamation, contact your state and/or local officials to see if they have specific processes for this type of request. Visit [link] to view the sample proclamation and [link] to view the sample proclamation request letter APCO International has prepared for your use. Update these documents with your communications center's information, and send it to your public official's office well in advance of National Public Safety Telecommunications Week. Be sure to follow up the request with a phone call to obtain the status of your request.

### Publicize the Proclamation.

Once you have received the Proclamation, prepare a press release to send to your local media announcing the proclamation and promoting your communications center. Visit [link] to view the sample press release APCO International has prepared for your use. Be sure to work with your public official's staff on the press

release as they may be able to provide assistance in the distribution of the release and may have specific guidelines or requests regarding the release. Also, you should try to obtain a quote from your public official for the press release. Send the release to your local media at the start of National Public Safety Telecommunications Week. If you would like assistance identifying your local media or sending your press release, please contact Courtney McCarron at [mccarronc@apco911.org](mailto:mccarronc@apco911.org) or 202.833.9600.

### Host a Tour and Press Conference.

Invite your public officials to visit your communications center and present the Proclamation in person during a press conference. This is a great way to show your public officials and the media the importance of public safety communications, your center, and some of the issues with which you are dealing. It is also an exciting event for your

staff. Visit [link] to view a sample press conference "to do" list APCO International has prepared for your use. Visit [link] to view a sample media advisory APCO International has prepared for your use.

For additional information on promoting your agency during National Public Safety Telecommunications Week, please contact Courtney McCarron at [mccarronc@apco911.org](mailto:mccarronc@apco911.org) or 202.833.9600.

### PROMO FILES FOR DOWNLOAD

Click on the links below to download document templates to use in positively promoting your communications center:

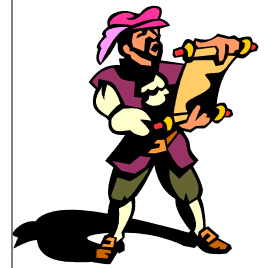
[Press Conference To Do](#)

[Sample Proclamation](#)

[Proclamation Cover Letter](#)

[Sample Press Release](#)

[Sample Media Advisory](#)



Invite your public officials to visit your communications center and present the Proclamation in person during a press conference



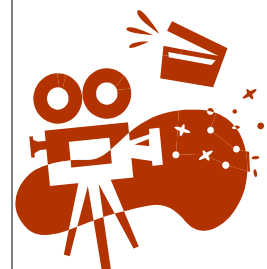
Visit the APCO Store for NPSTW apparel.

[www.designlabonline.com/apcotelecom/](http://www.designlabonline.com/apcotelecom/)

## Lights, Camera, Action!

Feature your communications center and telecommunications in a video honoring them, during national public safety telecommunications week. The telecommunications featured in this video didn't realize they were the stars. Consider creating a video of your communications center, your community and your community leaders,

thanking your telecommunications for their dedication. It can be as simple as some photos and video filmed from a digital camera, or as high-tech as your resources allow. Check out the web page and video that celebrate this comm center in Desoto County (FL) <http://www.desotosheriff.com/communications>.



## More Ideas to Celebrate...

- Select a dispatcher of the year
- Host an Awards ceremony honoring the dispatchers and call takers
- Arrange for a local celebrity to speak at the awards ceremony
- Prepare a proclamation (see p. 2)
- Give certificates of appreciate to each telecommunicator signed by the mayor, chief or other official
- Create buttons to wear throughout the week
- Hold an open house for the public (see p.4)
- Distribute educational material about your center and 9-1-1 to attendees of the open house
- Create a fact sheet about your center for the public, include statistical information
- Host a pot-luck or arrange for administrators/managers to cook for comm center shift teams
- Cook-out for employees and families
- Print an award of recognition for each telecommunicator, certificate paper is affordable
- Decorate a bulletin board with pictures and positive comments about your telecommunicators
- Cake and Ice Cream
- Goodie Bags with donations from local vendors
- Articles in local newspapers and magazines
- Celebrate with recognition for longevity, exemplary calls, etc.
- Banner announcing NPSTW and celebrating your telecommunicators in lobby or on outside marquee
- Host a training class
- Ask local businesses to write a letter of appreciation and post them on bulletin board
- Invite the local TV news to feature your comm center—toot your horn!
- Provide your telecommunicators with a casual shirt that can be worn during the week
- Invite your fire fighters, law enforcement officers, EMS personnel to meet the telecommunicators behind the radio voices
- Make a video of your comm center and employees and show at open house or award ceremony
- Invite local dignitaries—county council, city officials, etc. to meet telecommunicators
- Educate your public
- Decorate with colorful streamers
- Make and review a scrapbook of the past year
- Use your imagination—and then tell us about your great ideas!



**Invite your public officials to visit your communications center and present the Proclamation in person during a press conference**

## APCO Membership Who should join?

APCO represents anyone in the public safety telecommunications community including telecommunicators, supervisors, directors and managers, engineers, technicians, consultants or anyone that supplies materials and/or services to the public safety community. Our members come from 9-1-1 centers, fire departments, public

safety departments, transportation agencies, law enforcement agencies, emergency medical services, emergency management centers, forestry services, information systems and third-party call centers. For more information, visit [www.apcointl.org/membership](http://www.apcointl.org/membership).

**Idea for this spot?**

**Upload pics of your celebration to flickr?**



**Join us  
August 5-9  
Baltimore,  
Maryland**

## How to Plan an Open House

An open house can be a wonderfully rewarding event for your communications center. It is a great way to showcase the center and the hard working professionals that staff the center 24-hours a day. We know that not every communications center is ideally setup for tours and events. Additionally, you must remember to work within your agency's policies and procedures concerning the public and non-employees. Security issues in today's world are a very real factor and must be kept in mind when planning any sort of event open to non-agency personnel. However, we believe that with some creative thinking and thorough planning, an agency can host a successful open house event.

We questioned over 150 communications center directors, who told us many of the ins and outs of a comm center open house. We thank each of those APCO members for providing us with a vital communication stream to the membership.

As with any project, planning is the key element to a successful open house. It is recommended that you start planning your open house weeks – if not months – in advance. Have a schedule of monthly meetings where specific task lists are assigned to team members. Come away from each planning meeting with action items to be completed for the

next meeting – really make the meetings count!

Involve your telecommunicators in the early planning process. Getting telecommunicator buy-in and participation with help to ensure that your open house event showcases to the public the hardworking and dedicated public safety communications professionals that serve the community.

Consider making your open house a multi-agency event that highlights the working relationships between law enforcement, fire, EMS and Communications. It can be an excellent venue to display law enforcement vehicles, fire apparatus, helicopters, and mobile command centers. Make it a "Public Safety Day" where your community can learn about the vital life-saving services provided.

One thing to consider early on is whether or not your open house should be open to the public or by invitation only. If the agency opts not to open the event to the public, consider inviting the state senators, congressmen, local dignitaries, members of civic organizations such as the Rotary Club or Kiwanis, family members, a scout troop, etc. Offer your dignitaries the opportunity to speak at your event. It's an excellent opportunity for your hard working telecommunicators to receive a very public thank you.

If you decide to open your event to the general public, it can be promoted in your local newspaper, community magazine, local radio and television stations. You could invite your local radio and television news to broadcast live from your open house. One agency told us that they were able to put an insert into the utility bill promoting their open house. Spread the word!

The majority of the communications center directors we spoke with advocated a time limit on the open house. A several-hour long window can be exhausting for staff. Limit your open house to 2-3 hours. Consider having a special appearance by Red E. Fox, McGruff the Crime Dog or Sparky the Fire Dog. If your agency doesn't own one of these costumes, check with neighboring agencies to see if they loan them out. Have an in-house photographer on hand to take both staged and candid photos. It doesn't have to cost the agency a lot of money. Perhaps you have a staff member or family member with a flair for photography. Capturing highlights on video can be a way of preserving your event to share with others who weren't able to attend the open house.

Prior to your event, "spruce up" your comm center and work areas. Make them as clutter free as possible. Plan for a post-event clean-up crew that will empty the trash



**Your celebration  
can be as  
elaborate or as  
simple as  
resources allow.  
Most important,  
just celebrate!**





## Open House (cont.)



and perhaps run a vacuum. Pay close attention to the information that is visible to the guests. Do you have the chief's home phone posted where it could be easily obtained by a visitor? Perhaps it would be a good idea to make sure sensitive or confidential information is "out of reach" until the guests and visitors leave.

Have a staff member assigned as "host" who will keep things flowing and moving. Assign staff not working the consoles and phones to be tour guides, this will allow the dispatchers and call-takers to do their jobs during the open house. Create a script with talking points for all tour guides, this will ensure consistent coverage of items to be shared with the public. Be sure to take into consideration confidentiality issues and know that your tour guides understand what is to be and not to be discussed.

The comm center tour should be broken down into three phases: Before, During and After. Before the tour, have tourists congregate in a training room or multi-purpose room. Here, you can define the comm center tour rules, such as no cell phones, no wandering, explain that the comm center is a quiet zone, instruct to hold questions until after the tour. Use this as an opportunity to toot your horn with call statistics

and response generated. Educate your tour-members with CAD demonstrations and explanations of ANI/ALI, VoIP, etc. Don't forget to mention training! Explain to your tour-members that it takes a highly trained individual to staff the comm center they are about to see.

After individuals have visited the comm center, escort them to an area where you can have a question and answer period. Provide hand-outs about your center and 9-1-1 (stickers, magnets, giveaways, brochures, etc.). Allow for simulated practice calls with children and adults. Perhaps your agency can set up a work station for CAD simulation and use the time as an opportunity to confirm phone number and addresses. A word of caution here – one comm center director told me of a story where their agency checked phone numbers of guests. The address confirmation came up with some sensitive information about the resident - information that would keep a responder safe but might offend the guest. Use your best judgment.

Have you considered using your open house event as an employee recruitment opportunity? Have information available about your agency and its employee benefits available to give to inquiring open house attendees.

Consider offering your attendees a light

refreshment after their tour. You may have the monies budgeted for something like this, or, if your agency policy manual allows, consider asking local vendors for open house donations, such as cookies and punch or soft drinks. Be sure that the refreshments area is in a room away from your communications center to avoid a high-priced spill. Also, have cleaning supplies and plenty of paper towels on hand. Have the refreshments table staffed by staff or even staff members' family. Have a comm center guest book available for attendees to make comments about the event.

After your event, have one last and final team member meeting. Discuss the lessons learned. Read through attendee comments in the guest book or from comment cards provided to attendees during the event. Solicit feedback from all of staff concerning the event and compile the information received to use in planning your next event.

Probably the most important tid-bit of advice when planning your open house – plan for the unexpected. Remember to be flexible and adapt to the actual circumstances of your open house event. In the end, it will have been a lot of work, but one that should bring an unmeasured amount of success.

Tell us your ideas at [membership@apco911.org](mailto:membership@apco911.org)



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